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On touch-starved deathworlders and the power of hugs

OC OC

Another story of mine migrating from [r/HumansAreSpaceOrcs](#) to here. I hope you enjoy it :)

When the humans first greeted us, we were beyond cautious. We, too, were what the galaxy calls “deathworlders.” ...Except our case was actually far worse than theirs, if you can believe it.

We did not have the luxury of living on a world tolerant enough of us to advance our technologies nearly as fast as the humans did. I believe the farthest we got on our own was what they called “steam-power,” and even then only in VERY few of the larger settlements.

To grow up on the surface of our homeworld was to know dread at every waking moment. For what few of us were able to survive long enough that we were able to form memories, our elders taught us how to fight, how to kill. How to best make use of the spike-tipped horns evolution had granted us to fend off the beasts of the night. How to use our claws and fangs to rend the flesh of what few creatures we could consider prey instead of deadly predator.

But more important than to fight was how to think, and one thought was above all others:

To treat every being you encounter, even your own kind, as though it would not kill you without hesitation- nay, that it was not planning on doing it at any moment- was *insanity*.

...So when the first human diplomats appeared, descending from the heavens and stepping out of their ships from the stars, we just sighed and mentally tacked on yet another threat to the pile.

We were among the last of the settlements they approached. Despite the good tidings we heard from what few outsiders we allowed inside the 3-meter thick steel walls of our tribe’s home (barely enough to keep the night-beasts out, and worthless against the terror-beasts of the sky), we remained cautious. And when they finally approached us and made ready to greet us, and I was selected by lottery to be our tribe’s emissary... When the time came, I was ready for anything.

...Or at least I thought I was.

As they stepped out of their starships, I almost laughed at their appearance. Soft skin, little fur save for what paltry wisps graced the top of their heads, teeth and claws that clearly had no chance of being able to pierce the flesh of even the least of the creatures of this planet, much less being of any use in combat.

I almost let my guard down- almost- and only mentally drafted three different countermeasures on how to kill them all as they approached.

They engaged in pleasantries, offered gifts, everything they could to try and get me to let my guard down. To get me to slip up, show weakness- then they would strike. ...Or so I thought.

It went on for days. Every day I met with them, I grew more puzzled. When would they make their move? I would have done so by now. Perhaps they were intimidated by us? After all, the least of us were easily more than a

head taller than them, and their biological gifts for the hunt, the chase, the *kill* were pathetic.

Then, on the seventh day, one finally felt brave enough to “hug” me.

I tensed up, and it felt as though time slowed; to touch another without warning outside of training and sparring was tantamount to declaring your intent to kill, and I prepared to rip them to shreds.

...But something about the sensation gave me pause.

I could barely feel the pressure making its way through my fur to my scar-covered flesh, but it dampened my blood-rage. They were just- ...*holding* me. Softly, warmly.

I was beyond confused, and asked them what in the name of the lifeblood of my ancestors they were doing. Their response only puzzled me further:

“From what we’ve seen, heard and learned- well. ...Until you all trust us enough to let us rescue you from this hellhole of a world, you guys need this more than anything else we can offer.”

It was so unabashedly *strange*. To touch another, *without* meaning to kill them?

...

...And yet...

That sensation- that *feeling* was unique.

Touch.

Warmth.

Care.

Calm.

Trust.

It was alien- literally.

But though I didn’t know it at the time... they were right.

We *did* need it. I needed it.

...There’s a saying that I only learned later was quite popular among the deathworlders of the galaxy: “you don’t know you’re a deathworlder until you’ve left home.”

In that moment, that brief moment of compassion, it allowed me that much; to leave that world- if only mentally, for a moment.

If the customs of these visitors were such- to allow themselves to be vulnerable, despite their biology, despite their weakness, despite what I had believed to be common sense...

...Did they legitimately have no ill intentions towards us?

Against my better judgement- no, not just that, against *everything* I had drilled into me for as long as I could remember- I let my guard down, and returned the “hug.” Just standing there, sharing in that gentle pressure, just appreciating that moment, one unlike anything I’d ever felt before...

It felt- ...good...?

Yes.

Good...

Interacting like that with another, with no intent for violence, bloodshed, ending the lives of others... it was nice.

It allowed my mind to relax- for just a moment- and let go of the death, the stress, the blood, the violence, the pain, the loss, the grief, the pressure, the paranoia, the anger, the bitterness, the hatred, the spite, the sadness, the *fear*- all my constant companions, kept bottled up and tucked away deep inside me. All the things that I thought kept me safe all those years.

...And then the bottle cracked.

It didn’t register when I started shaking, and I don’t remember how I ended up unable to stop violently sobbing... But the human just hugged me tighter, gently brushed their hands through my fur and softly repeated four words, over and over.

The same four words I would hear to reassure me that I was making the right choice when I signed up for the initial “galactic integration programs” they offered.

The same four words I finally realized for myself as I looked out at the world I VERY gladly left behind for the last time.

The same four words I knew the truth of when I visited some of the other homeworlds of the galaxy and realized *just* how bad we had it.

The same four words I would hear as I first met with what they called “therapists” to treat my “severe PTSD” (an apparently high-universal condition for those of us who originated from the homeworld).

The same four words I had to remind myself of every day afterwards when old patterns of behavior and thought popped up.

The four words I marveled at every once in a while in endless gratitude for what I later learned was the only species brave enough to so much as consider landing on our living nightmare of a world in the first place with the intent of lifting us up:

“It’s ok. You’re safe.”